The Cross Of Golgotha

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The Cross of Golgotha

Lenten and Passiontide Meditations and Sermons

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THE CROSS OF GOLGOTHA.

Romans 5: 1-11.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience. And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarsely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

When by the prayers of his mother and through the powerful sermons of St. Ambrose, St. Augustine had come to the knowledge of the truth, he asked this advise from the man of God: What parts of the Holy Scriptures may I read to my best profit? Ambrose recommended to him the History of Christ's Sufferings and Death. Better counsel, of a truth,

he could not have given. For on this point, I am sure we shall all agree there can be no more powerful and heart-stirring record than that of Christ's Passion. To the Christian man and woman, however, it is not only a touching story, awakening all kinds of thoughts and sentiments; but far more it is the record of his own redemption from sin and reconciliation with God. And Lententide sets the task of creating and advancing an ever better appreciation of the deep significance of the Cross of Christ. *What is the Cross of Golgotha?* We ask St. Paul, and he gives the answer in his Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 5: 1-11.

1) *The Cross is the greatest miracle of the Love of God.*

Not as if otherwise the evidence of God's Love in our lives were lacking; but the supreme proof, the masterpiece of the Love of God, is the Death of Jesus. Even a man who had become confounded as to the Love of God; who, perchance embittered by misfortune or sufferings has doubted it, would, in view of the Cross of Golgotha, be constrained to ask: "What God is He who spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all; what God is He, who, in order to deliver man from his misery, lays this very misery, these chastisements, this death upon His only begotten Son?" What God? "God is Love", says John, and St. Paul comments: "In this God commendeth His Love toward us, i. e., proved his own love, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." For a righteous man, for a friend and benefactor some might surrender life; but Christ died for his enemies. He died for such as hated

him. He died for this world which, with its ingratitude and disobedience, with its indifference toward God, with its haughtiness, idolatry and injustice of all kind, proves to this day that it is unworthy of a love so profound, so divine. But God loved this world of ours in spite of its perverseness. God did the utmost to save it. He did not judge *the world.* His judgment was inflicted upon the *Innocent One.* Punishment was meted out to the Sinless One, in order that forgiveness might be bestowed upon sinners. Is not the Cross of Golgotha the greatest miracle of God's Love?

2) *The Cross of Golgotha is, furthermore, the veriest safeguard of our peace.*

"Being therefore justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." To have peace with God is identical with having a gracious and reconciled God, a God who no more prefers charges against, who inflicts no further punishment upon, believers. There is then no more a dividing line; "the middle wall of partition is broken down", says Paul in Ephes. 2, 14; there is no longer a cloud between God and man. The Sun of His Love shines into our hearts unhindered. Walking in the radiance of this Love is our peace. In alliance with Him who governs all things! In communion with Him who is Almighty and Merciful! To call Father and Friend the Most Sublime: what blessed privilege! Out of the very depth of such peace the Aposte exclaims: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and Martin Luther sings: "A Mighty Fortress is our God, a Sure Defence and Weapon."

And this peace has become the property of him who is justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Man may, indeed, deny his sin; yet such delusion gives neither rest nor peace. Man may endeavor to satisfy the requirements of the justice of God; he may imagine himself to be virtuous and upright; but this is not the way to peace. Peace with God is imparted to such an one only who, trusting in Christ with a penitent heart, confesses his sinfulness, and who realizes that he is absolved from all sin for the sake of the Christ. And as this justification is the root of our peace with God, so is the childlike prayer to the Heavenly Father a sure token of our communion with God. Are not conditions similar among men? As long as two friends have a feeling of estrangement toward each other, they avoid choosing the same paths, and do not even converse together. After a reconciliation has been effected, the former confidence is re-established, and association is once more a source of joy.

3) *The Cross of Christ is the strong anchor of our hope.*

What a joyful assurance speaks out of the words of the apostle! "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God!" Whence this rejoicing? Whence this assurance? Paul knew from experience:

I build on this foundation
That Jesus and His blood
Alone are my salvation,
The true eternal good:
Without Him, all that pleases
Is valueless on earth.
The gifts I owe to Jesus
Alone my love are worth.

If, humanly speaking, anyone had a right to rely upon his Christian walk, his circumspect behavior and burning trials and therefrom deduce recognition with God, this great apostle, this untiring servant of Jesus, could have done so. Yet never a word of it in his writings. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," he writes to the Corinthians. Never on his own works does he build his hopes, but ever and solely on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. By Christ's Death he deemed himself reconciled to God. He is fully assured that nothing can separate him from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem," says our Lord at the beginning of Lententide. Let us accompany him in order to praise the Love of God, in order ever more to become assured of our peace with him, and to build our hope on nothing else than upon the Cruified One!

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name:
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness seems to veil His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil;
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

His oath, His covenant and blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay;
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.
AMEN.

WHITHER SHALL I FLEE?

Hebrews 4: 14-5:9.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou are a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

Whither, my friends, shall we flee with our infirmities, sins, misery and death? A serious, an important and weighty question. The Lententide gives the answer. Whither may we flee in order to abide?

1) How rare are the people who weep with us when we are sad, who sense our trials as if they

were their own! To whom may we go with our pains and tears in order to be comforted and revived by their compassion? So rare are these such persons because true sympathy is sown sparsely among mankind, it is an exceptional enduement. Often a veritable longing for true brothers and sisters overwhelms us, so that with Joseph we are constrained to exclaim: "I seek my brothers!" Where are they? Where can we find even Christian people, who will not speak of themselves, and discuss their own interests only, but will have a heart for the welfare of their fellowmen, for immortal souls? "How are you?" This polite phrase is heard frequently enough, but ere you can make a reply and state your case the glib inquirer exploits his own excellent health and late accomplishments.

O God, our heavenly Father, if at this Lententide Thou art inclined to bestow upon us a blessing, fill thy children with deeper compassion for their fellowmen! And this behest includes all of us.

For others may, without question, make the same complaint about you and me. They had at times depended on our compassion and mercy, and what did they find? Not a Pharisee, not a Levite perhaps, but by no means a good Samaritan either. Many the mourners who came to us because they expected to find a sympathetic heart in their grief. We turned away from them coldly. Many are the sinners who knocked at our door, hoping to find compassionate love, which is the true balm for the world-weary and mortally wounded soul; alas! is our life so void of love that the heavy-laden cannot take heart to come to us Christians for help and comfort in

their anguish? Come Lord Jesus, give us a portion of thy compassion for a sin-sick world! Ah, yes! to Christ must we turn!

2) Of Christ's compassion for our infirmities speaks our text.

This word permits of a glance into the compassionate heart of our high-priest. Listen again: "For ours is not a high-priest who is incapable of syppathizing with our weaknesses; but one who has been tempted in every respect like ourselves, yet without sinning." He is the one eternal High Priest. On account of His true high-priestly heart, he has a feeling for us in our infirmities. There is not a trait in the character of Jesus which fills our souls with comfort more availing than His profound sympathy with the trials and miseries of mankind. What deep pity stirred his spirit when viewing human life! "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered as sheep having no shepherd." Look how physical ailments touched his soul. With sighs born of pity he brought them before the throne of the Father on high. "Looking up, He sighed", in the case of the deaf-mute. He wept with the weeping ones. "Jesus wept" at the grave of Lazarus, His friend. And now as to the sinner! Did not he evoke His pity in undivided fullness? The sinner in his error and infirmity: "and He looked upon Peter," after that disciple's denial in the palace of the high priest. The sinner in his callousness: "he beheld the city and wept over it." The sinner in his delusion: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." No rest for his weary soul while such misery prevailed. Man's

burdens He made His own burden. He took upon Himelf our sin, our death, our misery, in order to procure our salvation. Think of Gethsemane! Think of Golgotha! Of a truth in Jesus we have a friend with a fellow-feeling, a brother who takes pity on our sin-sick souls, high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. It was compassion that brought Him down from heaven to mingle with sinners. It was through compassion that He went about doing good, healing all sickness and diseases among His people. It was through compassion that He suffered and died. Since He is risen and has ascended into heaven, what is it that impels us to approach His mercy-seat? What makes us call upon Him and sigh unto Him? What makes Him our refuge and strength? His *compassion,* out of which He now intercedes for us as our heavenly Advocate at the Father's court.

Jesus' compassion differs from our compassion in this that it is profound, energetic and holy. Man's sympathy is often superficial, the personal experience of trial and sorrow wanting. The rich man senses not the distress of poverty. The happy ones know not the condition of the unfortunate. But Jesus knows. He has experienced it all. He knows, ye poor ones, the agony of hunger, He knows, ye sick and suffering ones, your sickness and pain. You who are lonely need not think that Jesus knew not the horrors of being forsaken. That He might feel with you this utter agony He was forsaken by the Father when dying on the cross. Ye tempted ones, remember that He burned in the heat of direst temptation. He passed through hours in which all around Him seemed to collapse. His soul lay prostrate in

misery and distress when the time drew near in which He was to bear the world's sin, your sin. Whatever may cause us anxiety, it vexed Him likewise. He passed through all these experiences in order that, having suffered and having been tempted in all points like as we are, He might be able to help us who are tempted.

Man's compassion is often in vain because it can not render effective help. Words, well-sounding words are the extent of man's assistance at best. True sacrifice our selfishness forestalls. The pittance thrown out may perhaps in a degreee alleviate our distress, but it does not remove it. And gifts coupled with reluctance on the part of the giver were best withheld. In a social gathering someone was relating the straightened circumstances of a poor family. The father had met with an accident. The mother was stricken with tuberculosis. The children were helpless. One man only opened his purse and placed One Hundred Dollars on the table. Turning to his neighbor he asked: How much do *you* pity this poverty-stricken family? Silence was the answer. This I call practical compassion. Jesus did not limit His compassion to words. He brought a sacrifice. He sacrificed himself without counting the cost. He rushed into the very jaws of death to rescue the perishing race and to deliver His people from eternal misery.

Man's sympathy often leads him to take the wrong course. In view of the affliction of his fellowmen, he overlooks the holiness and justice of God. There is misery on earth inflicted on account of sin. Beware of misplaced compassion. A weak mother at

times takes the part of the child over against the just indignation of a father. Thus we may take man's part over against God with disregard of divine chastisement and judgment. In cases like this a reprimand on account of human folly must precede our assistance, and aid should be rendered only after the sinner has turned from his iniquity and has given evidence of true repentance. Some people grow indifferent toward God and the honor of God from sheer sentimentality. Just as there are Christians, who, for all outward service and activity never see the needs of their indigent, suffering fellowmen, so there are, on the other hand, thousands who glory in their benevolence and affability, while they are at odds with the Christian religion. In Christ we find both wisdom and service wonderfully united: Compassion for mankind and perfect regard for the honor of God. Pleading the cause of man in heaven, He likewise pleads the cause of the Father on earth. Jesus would never have done anything out of pity that offended against the righteousness of God. Jesus never shut His eyes to sin, because He loved the sinner. His compassion is holy compassion, and on that account He rescues us from sin, while misplaced charity only renders worse the beneficiary.

3) Whither, then, shall we flee?

To the world, the cold, pitiless world? Poor Judas! With thy agitated conscience thou didst flee to the world. It met thee with its scorn: "What is that to us? See thou to it!" Whither then shall we flee? To Mary, the mother of Jesus, as our poor deluded Catholic brothers do? Oh erring mortals! How could you ever fall into such a pit? How could Mary,

sinful as we ourselves, have greater pity with you than the compassionate friend of souls, Jesus, our Redeemer? To us evangelical Christians it is an unbearable tought that we should have to seek the mediation of a weak mortal woman before coming to the Saviour Himself to offer our prayers and receive a gracious answer. No, and again no, to the mother of Jesus we do not flee. We have Paul for our spokesman: "There is but one Mediator between God and man." It is Jesus Christ, the Beloved. To him we flee in our distress. This is the plain meaning of our text: Because He can sympathize with our weaknesses, therefore "let us draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need."

Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?
"Come to me," saith One, "and coming,
Be at rest."

Hath He marks to lead me to Him,
If He be my guide?
"In His feet and hands are wound-prints
And His side."

Hath He diadem as Monarch,
That his brow adorns?
"Yea, a crown in very surety,
But of thorns."

If I find Him, if I follow,
What His guerdon here?
"Many a sorrow, many a labor,
Many a tear."

If I still hold closely to Him,
What hath He at last?
"Sorrow vanquished, labor ended,
Jordan passed."

If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me nay?
"Not till earth and not till heaven
Pass away."

Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?
"Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer, 'Yes'."

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

Rom. 3: 19-31.

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Man in his vain imagination has made and still makes many attempts to extricate himself out of his awkward position towards God. Failures all! I do not have in mind those spiritually blind who don the vesture of virtue, as it were, thinking that their cause with God is in the best of order. Nay, even people who acknowledge the fact that in their sinfulness they cannot pass the test before the throne

of righteouness, stray on many a by-way ere found on the straight and narrow path. A favorite evasion is that man seeks to minimize his sin, that he veils it, excuses it. Futile endeavor! Some make the resolution: I will better myself. Splendid intention! Yet, first pay your old debt. Are you able to do it? Formerly, in medieval days men were struck with the peculiar notion to enter the convent, to lacerate their bodies, to fast, to launch out on all sorts of legalistic efforts in order to reconcile God, although they had not even performed the old law which He had laid down. Alas, how insufficient are all these attempts!

Even this is a vain thing—to imagine that with his own repentance, tears, and pious emotions man can atone for his own sins and wash away his transgressions. All such endeavors, be they ever so seriously meant, are tantamount to the purpose of absolving oneself, of trying to justify oneself. On this intention bent, man aims to blot out his sin in person. It will be found a matter of impossibility. You could sooner cast the mountain into the deep sea than expiate your sins in the sight of God. You could sooner turn darkness into light, make a tiger out of a lamb, than change yourself by your own reason and strength from a sinner to a righteous man, acceptable to God. This one only can accomplish, He, who says: "I am the Lord, and there is no Saviour beside me." "I, even I"—note here the emphasis in the repetition, denoting the exclusion of all other factors—"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake; and will not remember thy sins," says our God. Lo and be-

hold! God himself must blot out all our sins. Otherwise there is no absolution. And He does it by justifying, i. e., declaring just the penitent sinner. And by this argumentation we have arrived at the only possible salvation there is for us: The justification of the sinner by God himself, of which Paul writes in our text, Romans 3: 19-31.

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE.

Let us note the following points:

1) God is just and justifies. Does it not at first sight appear like a contradiction that God is just and that He declares the sinner just? Keeping in mind that declaring just, i. e., justifying is tantamount to absolving a defendant, freeing the culprit, remitting the punishment due the transgressor—how does that agree with God's Justice? Has He not Himself given the assurance: "Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book." (Exodus 32:33). Has he not threatened: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them." (Deut. 27:26)? Has He not threatened the sinner with eternal punishment? All these threats, are they to be valid no longer? Is God to be likened to man, a weak father, perchance, who threatens his son and fails to carry out the chastisement? How am I to bring into harmony these contrasts that God is just and yet absolves, frees me, the transgressor of the Law? Tell me, how can I make it to accord with God's justice, this mercy which forgives all sin and casts it into the depth of the sea, so that it is remembered no longer. How is it brought to chime in perfect harmony, you ask?

On GOLGOTHA! ON GOLGOTHA! What do you see there? That God is just. That God punishes sin. That God condemns sin. You see it in the man Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, i. e., an instrument to expiate our sin, to atone for our sin. How did Jesus expiate our sin? Amid the floods of the wrath of God and the terrors of Divine Judgment. How he lay prostrate in the dust before the Eternal Judge in Gethsemane; and again, when the Father made him to be condemned to death and a curse for us, when His body was bruised, and His hands and His feet pierced by cruel nails on account of God's wrath against sinners; when He was parched with thirst; when He tasted the anguish of being forsaken by God—what does it all mean? Nothing else than that God is just. God chastised the Christ for our sin, in order that, since satisfaction has been rendered by Jesus, He might pour upon us the fullness of his grace, the stream of his mercy. Oh, what a severe and holy God is He who in the Death of His Son has shown us how He judges sin; but at the same time what a gracious Judge is He who now absolves us who have faith in Jesus! Justice and Mercy now chime forth in perfect harmony; justice by which Jesus suffers punishment and dies; mercy by which we receive grace and live for the sake of Christ. God is just, and for the very reason that He is just and has judged our sin on Golgotha, therefore can He now declare every one just who believes in Jesus Christ.

2) Note well, he only is justified who believes in Jesus Christ.

Do you believe in Him? Do you cling to Him

in perfect confidence? Then you are justified, free, absolved from all guilt, from all punishment; you are a child of God; the Sun of Grace smiles upon you; the eternal inheritance is assured you. And if you had been a publican, a malefactor, if your sin had been as red as scarlet, yet if you believe in Jesus, "God is here who justifies.—Who will condemn? Christ is here, who died for us."

If, however, you do not believe, be you ever so holy and righteous; you may praise yourself and let other men praise you, if you do not believe in Christ, you are an unrighteous and ungodly person, excluded from heaven unto all eternity.

This, then, is the all-availing requirement: God must absolve you! God must justify you! Whether the world condemns me to hell or exalts me to heaven, that is all the same, if only my God and Father, against whom alone I have sinned, assures me: "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and will not remember thy sins." I, the Father, declare thee a child of mine. And this he does if only in faith I look up to Christ; if the Christ I seize with the hands of faith; if in this I trust, on this I build: "The Blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." This is justification, or the gracious absolution of the sinner before the judgment-seat of God, out of the free grace of God, for the sake of Christ, by faith, the only salvation which remains for us; for by works no flesh is justified.

3) And this at length the apostle adds: Far be it from us to make the Law of God of none effect

by this teaching, so that we cared nothing as to the mode of living on the part of believers, i. e., that they could do as they pleased, run riot in wickedness, just so they believed. Nay, on the contrary, we establish the law, i. e., from the true faith there results the proper Christian life. With righteousness brought about by faith, the righteousness of life begins. For you cannot pluck faith out of the heart like a dead root. Faith is like unto a light, which sends forth its rays from a given center. Faith is life, which vitalizes a man through and through. It is impossible to find grace and forgiveness in the sacrifice of Jesus and at the same time reserve a cold heart toward God and man. On the contrary, a heart filled with true and living faith feels proper gratitude for God's Grace. This is the inner sentiment: "Let us love him, for he first loved us," or as we sing in one of our favorite Lenten hymns: "O Love, I give myself to Thee, Thine ever, only Thine to be."

Justification engenders sanctification. Out of faith grows love. "Where there is forgiveness of sin, there are also life and salvation."

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!
Let the water and the blood
From Thy wounded side that flowed
Be of sin the perfect cure.
Save me, Lord! and make me pure.

Should my tears forever flow,
Should my zeal no languor know,
This for sin could not atone:
Thou must save and Thou alone!
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eye-lids close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me!
Let me hide myself in Thee.

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE SCHOOL OF AFFLICTION.

Heb. 12: 1-13.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them wich are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Our young people incline to the belief that with their graduation they bid farewell to school. But that is the very time when they enter school: the

great school, the school of life, which to many is a school of affliction. How many here at this very moment attend it, having their tests, their sorrows. How many will be in the midst of examination ere it is realized. Christians are cross-bearers. The Christian life is a school of affliction. The chief object is to learn well in this school the lessons which our heavenly Father assigns.

"*The Christian in the School of Affliction is our theme.*" What are the lessons to be learned?

1) *I must suffer.*

This is the first lesson. It is the subject-matter of the primary department in the school of affliction, to submit to sorrowful visitations because God sends them. There is no such a thing as "blind chance" or "cruel fate", which governs our lives; there is here no aimless confusion of happiness and misery, good and evil days; on the contrary, there is in life a plan and order; above all there operates the wonderful counsel of God; an almighty hand rules all and dispenses joy and sorrow, the omnipotent hand of the Father in Heaven, our Father. Why is it that I have to suffer so much, you ask? Because God is your Father, and you, His child, are in need of discipline. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which reasoneth with you as with sons, My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reproved of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

God, your Father! Where is there a child whom

a righteous, godly father does not at times reprove and chastise? All Christian parents do so, because they want their children to live good and honorable lives. And He, the true Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, surely has a Father's good right to train us as He deems best. Is it not His great love for us that does this? Are not all our afflictions, all our tests, loving strokes of his paternal hand, for which we will yet learn to thank him, just as the right kind of children, after they have attained to years of understanding, thank their faithful parents for all corrections? If in the days of our childhood we have submitted to the discipline of our earthly father, how much more should we submit to our Heavenly Father, when He sees fit to chastise us. Verily He never would punish us arbitrarily or angrily, but rather to train us for holiness. Or, as said that godly old priest when comforting young Luther in his illness: "Whomsoever God loves and whomsoever He wishes to train for useful ends, to him He early sends the holy cross, in which school patient people learn many profitable lessons." God is our Father, and we are in need of his discipline as children are in need of the rod on account of their sin. Our christian consciousness, perchance, has gone to sleep. By affliction, most likely, God aims to awaken you. May be the gold of your faith is imbedded in dross, and the fire of tribulation is intended to refine it that it may flow purely. Or may you not have strayed on a wrong path, so that your trials are sent to hail you: "Return, o wanderer, return! My lost sheep come back to the flock whence you have strayed."

Last, not least, may not God have chosen this cross or that visitation to make you more just, more charitable towards others? However bitter our chastisement may seem at the time "afterwards it yieldeth peacable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness." In the midst of your sufferings, therefore, remember, it is a remedy prescribed by God for your cure; or the precious metal must be refined by the fire under the melting pot; the grape-vines must be pruned if they are to bear abundant fruit. I must suffer. If you have appropriated this lesson, you are ready to advance into the Intermediate Department of the school of affliction, and here you learn:

2) *I can suffer,* namely, if the Savior Himself imparts strength, and if I look up to Him according to the directions of our text: "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith."

What is it that really renders affliction so hard that at times the cross-bearer imagines he can endure it no longer? We look upon ourselves entirely too much, upon our misery, and too little upon the Lord Jesus. When Peter viewed the dark, roaring waves around him, he was frightened. When he looked up to Jesus and seized his hand, he was saved. Man looks at his troubles too much, and this practice renders him obstinate and despondent. Obstinacy says: How have I deserved this? Despondency imagines: God has forgotten me. Obstinacy swallows all its misery and chokes. Despondency clamors from the house-tops. Obstinacy strays from God. Despondency peddles its tale of woe from house to house. What a transformation, if

we look up! If we look up from our distress upon Jesus, the Crucified, upon his wounds and pains, upon his severe and bitter death, upon his sorrowfulness and sore trouble, upon his thousandfold visitation, his woe and anguish! Look up to Jesus, witness what He has suffered, how He suffered for us. And then? Will you continue to murmur: "How have I deserved such woe?" Must you not rather agree: "It is I who should pay for my sin, as He did, the Sinless One?" Will you still complain of Providence: "God does not think of me?" Should you not rather sound the Saviour's praise:

> Most strange and wondrous ransom ever proffered:
> Our faithful Shepherd for the sheep was offered;
> The righteous King, for servants disobeying
> The debt was paying.

No, against such a God one ought to murmur no longer, nor complain of so beneficent a Providence.

In the Saviour we recognize more and more two qualifications without which no one can suffer in a Christian manner: Humility and trust in God, Humility and Faith. And the daughter of humility and faith is patience. If we have patience, we are able to endure, we are able to run the race that is set before us. Think of that Christian sufferer who, when pitied on account of her incurable affliction, exclaimed: "Alas, how much severer than my own the passion of my Saviour!" Any one having learned that lesson in the school of the holy cross, is ready to be promoted into the Senior Department, where the lesson is one of continuous resignation:

3) *I will suffer.*

"Aye, Father, aye, with all my heart, what Thou lay'st on I'll carry." These words the sainted poet puts on the lips of the voluntary Ransom for the world's sins. "Not mine, but Thy will be done." Thus the Lord, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, prayed himself into resignation, into obedience. This rule now applies in our case. Emulate him in obedience. Emulate him in self-denial. Emulate him in the surrender of your will to the Will of the Father in Heaven. To will as God wills, that is the perfection of Christian Faith. To will as God wills, even when our favorite wishes and hopes are thwarted, that is the triumph of Christian fortitude. Even when it cannot be without pain and bitter tears, let us submit to what God ordains.

This lesson, to be sure, imposes arduous study upon the best of Christians. The whole Christian life is thus presented as a school in which the final session having been reached, the last lesson to be assigned is: "Learn of Jesus how to die according to the will of God." This lesson learned the last examination has been passed successfully. School is closed—this earthly school of affliction and discipline. We ascend to the cloud of witnesses, who before us have learned life's lessons and have finished the course of instruction. Yes, we ascend to Him, who preceded us in this same school through sufferings to the glory everlasting, through the cross to the crown!

Christian, dost thou see them
On the holy ground,
How the hosts of darkness
Compass thee around?
Christian, up and smite them,

Counting gain but loss;
Smite them by the merit
Of the holy Cross.

Christian, dost thou feel them,
How they work within,
Striving, tempting, luring,
Goading into sin?
Christian, never tremble;
Never be down-cast;
Gird thee for the battle,
Watch and pray and fast.

Christian, dost thou hear them,
How they speak thee fair:
"Always fast and vigil?"
"Always watch and prayer?"
Christian, answer boldly,
"While I breathe, I pray."
Peace shall follow battle,
Night shall end in day.

Hear the words of Jesus:
"O My servant true,
Thou art very weary—
I was weary, too;
But that toil shall make thee
Some day all Mine own,
And the end of sorrow
Shall be near My throne."

WHY MUST WE LEAD A GODLY LIFE?

1 Peter 1: 17-25.

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

The Street Department of our city is having all public thoroughfares cleaned for spring. Rubbish and accumulations along the curbings are being hauled to hollows and out-of-the-way places. This in accordance with the rules of sanitation. It is a true pleasure to walk along clean streets.

The other day, when witnessing this activity, I could not refrain from thinking: Would that there were brooms and conveyances to sweep in a heap and utterly remove another species of filth: all the

careless, vicious, frivolous, ungodly manners of our age. Such a possibility, however, seems far remote. We must rest content, witnessing against it publicly in word and script, and proclaiming the mode of living which corresponds to the Christian rule of life. If the greater majority refuses to listen, there always will be a respectable minority intent upon christian practice, eager to pass their time of sojourning in the fear of God.

WHY MUST CHRISTIANS LEAD A GODLY LIFE?

For an answer read our text, which informs us:

1) *Because Christ has redeemed us from the vain manner of living.*

Putting it into the language of the catechism we say: "Christ has redeemed us from sin." To Him and His vicarious atonement, which He accomplished on Golgotha, we owe it that we are no longer heathen, but Christians, who call upon God as Father, and who for their sins have found forgiveness with God. When a father pardons his child, he does it, of course, on the supposition that his child will improve; that henceforth this son or daughter will gladden the father's heart by implicit obedience. Now, when God pardons man, this gracious act should logically result in the fruitage of earnest endeavor on the part of man to depart from evil. Otherwise there would be no sense in forgiveness. If in spite of this we see that people, who call themselves Christians, stain their lives with pagan sins and vices, this must be termed a relapse of the saddest kind, a relapse, in-

deed, from Christianity into heathenism, from liberty into bondage, from the state of grace into the state of disgrace and the wrath of God. Such relapse is as if a man, delivered from prison, preferred again to be subject to the yoke of a taskmaster instead of rejoicing in his freedom. And what are all the shackles of penal servitude compared with the bonds and chains with which sin, avarice, for instance, or drunkenness, or unchastity, holds its bond-servants in iron grip! No, Christ has broken these chains for every one who from a sincere heart desires to be freed, to be redeemed. Christians must pass the time of their sojourning in piety, because:

2) *Christ has redeemed them with his blood,* i. e., with his sacrifice, with his innocent sufferings and death. In one of our less familiar Passion-Hymns we read:

In that last night on Mt. Olives
Knelt I, my Father imploring,
Reddened with blood-sweat, that pouring
Flowed there like rivers for thee.
Ah, and who knows whether thou
Ever once thinkest of me?

Painfully bruised with a thorn-crown
Dressed as a king in derision,
Sentenced through Pilate's decision:
Always I thought but of thee.
Ah, and who knows whether thou
Ever once thinkest of me?

Heaven and earth gazed with horror
As to the cross I was lifted;
Shadows of night round me drifted
When I was dying for thee.
Ah, and who knows whether thou
Ever once thinkest of me?

This ever repeated "Ah, and who knows," etc., clearly points to the fact that there are thousands who know full well wherewith they have been redeemed; and yet, alas! they live as if they did not know it. The Passion Story is a record familiar to them; yet in the pursuit of pleasure or carnal enjoyment does the average modern individual want to be disturbed by the view of the Crucified One? They readily join in the hymn:

> What was the cause of all such tribulation?
> Ah, for my sins it was the expiation!

But it does not keep them from flirting and dallying with the very sin for which Jesus paid the price of his precious life! The old doctrine of the Scriptures and the Church, indeed, is still believed in: "Christ was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities"; but at the same time new transgressions and sins are accumulated day by day, and that without fear or restraint. Christians, so-called, know how severely the Savior was punished to make reparation for our transgressions, our vanity, pride, lies, etc., yet withal there is no decrease of vanity, pride and lying. From this it is clearly evident that man is not profited by knowledge if it be but knowledge of the head, of reason, and if this knowledge has failed to penetrate the heart as sanctifying and redeeming truth; if it has not effected a change in the life. Christians know that they have been redeemed, "not with silver and gold, but by the blood (i. e., the sacrifice) of Jesus Christ," and since they know this, since they cannot plead the excuse of ignorance, they must lead a godly life. This finally ensues from this:

3) *That Christians are redeemed for the service of God* in chastity, in the truth and in love, as the epistolic lesson of last Sunday (Laetare) enjoins: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren." Love one to another is again herewith designated the best asset of the Christian life, as the precious fruit of the Death of Jesus. But since pure love and true can not dwell in impure hearts, since love cannot live under one roof with the lie, therefore must the redeemed of Christ adorn themselves with chastity and truth.

There are three noble sisters, of whom one, Love, seeks an abode among men. She knocks at the doors of the homes inquiring whether her sisters live there. And when she finds them not, she sorrowfully turns away, veiling her face. But wherever her two sisters, Chastity and Truth, have taken up their lodging, there Love is pleased to enter, and wherever the three have made their home, there is a blessed Christian household; there we find true Christian living.

Easter is at hand, the feast of the unleavened bread, upon which all homes in Israel were cleaned thoroughly from all leaven, from all fermentation. Shall not we, too, begin to cleanse our spiritual houses, in order to enjoy a precious Easter-tide? Alas, there is enough to be swept out! All that opposes chastity: bad, wild, filthy habits. Sweep them out! Unclean desires, evil thoughts. Sweep them out! All that opposes the truth: lying, deceiving, slandering. Sweep them out! Let them be far removed from our association and communion. Let our speech be pure and true. All that opposes

love: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and railing be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God also for Christ's sake forgave you." Who will make the start? Of what use the cleaning of the streets, if our homes and our city sink into the mire of immorality!

The Spirit's fruits are peace and love.
And purity from heav'n above;
Grace, meekness, gentleness and joy,
With goodness, new-born lives employ.

The Spirit makes life's pathway plain,
Imparts the grace that will sustain;
And grace its work in those will show,
Who truly to the Spirit sow.

They that are Christ's have crucified
Their flesh with all its lusts and pride,
And seek in truth what they profess,
And walk the paths of holiness.

Lord, fill with grace our wayward heart,
Nor let Thy Spirit from us part;
O save us from still hidden sin,
And form our nature pure within.

That watchful, prayerful, sober, strong,
We grow the more as strifes prolong,
And of the Spirit reap at last
Eternal life, when strife is past.
Amen.

THE MISERY OF MAN AND THE MERCY OF GOD.

Romans 5: 12-21.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Morever the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

There are but two fundamental and cardinal doctrines to be found in the Holy Scriptures. Every true Christian has absorbed these two doctrines. They are easily understood. These two doctrines are: The Misery of Man and the Mercy of God. The one is bitter, the other is sweet. The one humbles,

the other one exalts. In our text the apostle Paul puts them to the fore in boldest contrast. "As through one trespass judgment came unto all men to condemnation"—this is, the misery of man—"Even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" —this represents the mercy of our God. "As through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners"—this points out the misery of man, "even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous"—this again declares the mercy of our God. Conceive properly, my friend, of both the Misery of Man and the Mercy of God, and you have grasped the full import of the Christian religion.

2) Man's misery, of a surety, is evident to every one, who does not intentionally shut his eyes to our natural state. How much appalling moral misery we behold all around us! In other words, how much sin there is on earth, not taking into consideration at all the many crimes and vices, but merely the whole welter of carelessness, haughtiness, selfishness, envy, avarice, unfaithfulness, ingratitude, voidness of love and the like, concerning which no culture, no civilization can deceive the unprejudiced mind. The question has been raised: Whence this demoniacal power of sin in the world? Where did it originate? Ample answer to this question is supplied by the Holy Scriptures only. Moses gives it (Genesis 3); Paul in our text confirms it: "Through one man sin entered into the world." This passage, as you know from your catechism, implies the doctrine of original sin, which from the fall of the

first man on down has been inherited by his entire posterity in all the ages past, and in consequence of which not one of us is good, no, not one. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Genesis 8:21). And thence comes the universal physical and spiritual misery which we witness at every step—misery, which neither the secular nor the sacred writers have found words sufficient to describe and lament. Not only does the book of Job raise the doleful plaint: "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward," but even an ancient sage of Greece declares: "To die is better than to live, for the heart of man is subject to dire woe." Not only does Solomon, the learned scholar of Holy Writ, out of a soul in anxious vexation, release the sigh: "Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity," but even Homer, the bard of the classical age of Greece, speaks of "the fate of mortals to live full of anxious gloom." A modern poet has put it in this form:

"We live on earth with frailty charged so bleak,
Unhappy, though of happiness we speak.
Sighing we seek it, no one likes to die.
Yet changeless days beyond our powers lie.

At times there gleams in features giv'n to pain
Brief pleasure—but it's all in vain!
It gleams and vanishes in night and dross—
What's left? Privation, sorrow, loss!

What does it amount to, over against this fact, that some people eat and drink the palatable dainties which this domain supplies; that, perchance, some relish more ideal pleasures, enjoyments on happy occasions in the family, delight in the arts and sciences; yet all the more bitter is the end await-

ing us all, death; and after death a gloomy something which does not lose its terrors on the ground that some deny its existence. "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." This is the somber painting presenting to our vision man's misery. You must have studied it in order to appreciate:

2) *The Mercy of God in Christ Jesus!*

The apostle draws a comparison between Adam and Christ. He compares the fruits which their actions have produced for man. The deed of disobedience and defection on the one hand, the deed of obedience and humilation in Gethsemane and on Golgotha on the other. A world of sin and death which had its beginning in Adam; a world of grace and life which opened up with Jesus. What the one had despoiled, the other restored. What we in Adam lost, Christ Jesus brings back to us: innocence, righteousness, peace, joy, life eternal. It sounds harsh beyond measure that in Adam we have all become sinners; the harshness, however, is adjusted as we hear that in Christ Jesus we all are made righteous once more. Another man's disobedience grew to be our disaster; another one's obedience becomes our salvation. And on that latter account we are enabled with the apostle to exult: "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." Of a truth, what sin, like a madly rushing stream, spreading destruction everywhere from generation to generation, ruined, poisoning all, infecting all, condemning all, now grace, flowing like a still water, ever serene and clear from Golgotha's summit, has fertilized again, cleansing all, rescuing all, saving all who be-

lieve in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Oh, the tyranny of sin, which has subjected all to death, making this grim reaper the king of terrors! But let us magnify the power of Mercy, which employs death itself, the Death of Jesus, in order to destroy this foe of man and bring life and immortality to light! The power of sin makes the universe a vale of lamentation, and fills dying ones with fear unspeakable, bereaved ones with hopeless mourning. But now what mercy has come from God to illumine our lives with hope, making endurable even extreme sufferings, in view of the Crucified and Risen One! Over the cradle of the new-born babe man was wont to lament: "Poor little creature, into what misery you have been born!" Now in Holy Baptism the mercy of God hails the denizen of life's great city: "Blessed babe, you are redeemed!" Over the dying couch of the struggler in the final battle it used to be written: "Death is the wages of sin!" Now the writing on the wall has been changed; and we read the inscription: "The gift of God is eternal life!" Thanks to God! "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Our nature fell in Adam's fall;
One common sin infects ûs all,
From sire to son the bane descends,
And over all the curse impends.

Corruption creeps through all our powers,
And withers all life's heavenly flowers;
In guilt we draw our earliest breath,
And reap its fruit of woe and death.

From hearts depraved, to evil prone,
Flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone;

God's image lost, the darkened soul
Nor seeks nor finds its heavenly goal.

But Christ, the second Adam came
To bear our sin, and woe, and shame;
To be our life, and by his grace
To new-create our fallen race.

Thanks, Saviour! That new life is ours,
That grace has changed our broken powers;
O, still that saving grace extend,
To make us steadfast to the end.
Amen.

THE BIG "I" MUST BE CROSSED OUT.

Gal. 2: 16-21.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

The most difficult part of redemption is to be saved from ourselves. Although it is, indeed, implied in redemption from sin, we do not always have in mind that the Fundamental Sin from which Christ longs to deliver us is selfishness, egotism. The beloved big "I" is the chief idol of man, and must be dethroned. The seventh petition of the Lord's Prayer might well read: "Lord, deliver me from myself." Somewhere in a Christian home I once saw a strange wall-motto. Behind glass and frame upon a white back-ground there was wrought in black embroidery and very prominently a capital "I", and through this letter there was drawn in the same style of handiwork striking the very heart as it were, a heavy arrow in bright

red. This motto I admired, not indeed for its beauty, but for the truth it conveyed. To me it preached: THE BIG "I" MUST BE CROSSED OUT. Or in the words of Holy Writ: "Jesus must increase; I must decrease." Or, as Paul puts it: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

1) How awful the power of the idol "I", of selfishness. The big "I" ever wants to be something, to represent something in the world. More honor! More recognition! Thus "ego" raves without ceasing. Some people are as convinced of their excellency and superiority as the rooster of the barn-yard, which imagined that the sun rose every morning just to hear him crow. This, you say, is ludricrous and absurd. But do we not imagine that the whole universe centers in our little self? Is not our proud opinion of self, our vanity, our passion for glory, our thirst for honor, our fishing for compliments and the applause of men—is it not extremely ridiculous, and sinful besides? People begrudge one another their honor, their preferences and gifts. The big "I" would claim it all for itself.

The big "I," however, not only wants to be something; it likewise covets many possessions, and having acquired them, craves ever more and more. The more is has, the more it wants. Indeed, big "I" is the real glutton. Whence otherwise that covetousness, that avarice and greed for gain, this running and chasing after temporal possessions, this envy and green-eyed jealousy at the good fortune of others, this permanent discontent on the part of the majority of people? Contentment, of a truth, is to-day the rarest of virtues. Why is it that RECEIVING is

so pleasant and sweet, while GIVING seems so unpleasant and sour? Selfishness is the cause; the big "I" dislikes to part even with possession for which it has no need. The big "I" craves the dainties of the earth, and indulges in carnal delights. It staggers from appetite to satisfaction, and in the midst of very satisfaction it covets new delights. Thence comes concupiscence for questionable enjoyments and sinful pleasures in our age; thence the riotous living of the rich and the threatening, defiant attitude of the poor, who often crave nothing but participation in the cup of affluence. Out of selfishness grows all disaster, wars and strife among men, just because the individual cares only for his interest regardless of others. With selfishness originates the inward dismemberment of hearts, that bitter unhappiness which we dread in our fellowmen, lamentations, anxious cares, just because big "I" never rests content. Out of the stagnant pool of selfishness there arise the poisoned fumes of unbelief, which aim at the dethronement of the Almighty in order to extol self on the pinnacle of distinction. Alas, what a heinous idol, is the god "I"! Verily, the prophet's saying, "All idols must perish from the earth," must include the chief idol of mankind. The big "I" must die; must be crossed out; must be deleted.

2) The only question is how to break the power of selfishness within us.

The natural man knows but one commandment, while he ignores the Ten Commandments of the Most High. That one commandment of his reads: "Thou shalt love thyself above all things, worship thyself, and look out for thine own interest." Out of this

principle of selfishness have been born such absurd and trite phrases as these: "Charity begin at home"; "My shirt is closer to my body than my coat". Why, we now even have a materialistic science which inscribes the blankest egotism upon its banner. Well, we know how severely and mightily the Law of God contends against this tendency to egotism from the first to the last commandment. No, no, not thyself, but GOD shalt thou love, and thy neighbor as thyself. But this is our very misery, that from the law we well discern the things which should be, and the more glarily detect our shortcomings, and sense our real opposition to God's Commandments. By the Law, however, there is no love; the law does not put an end to selfishness. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified," says the apostle. How then? By faith in Jesus Christ.

When the ark of the covenant of God, the Holy of Holies in Israel, as a spoil of war, had been brought into the temple of Dagon, this chief idol of the Philistines, on the following morning, was found prostrate on its face before the ark. It had fallen from its base. With much effort the heavy image was raised and replaced on its pedestal, to be found again on the next day on the marble floor of the temple, with hands and feet severed from the trunk.

Let Jesus, the Crucified, enter into your heart by faith, and a power is instilled, stronger by far than all selfishness, a blessed power to conquer, to dethrone the idol "I" from its self-made and self-exalted position. Here we have the solution of our problem. This must become the object of our efforts. In the place of selfishness, which inherently rules our lives,

another power must be installed and given the reins of government. This power is the Love of Jesus Christ, who has given His life for us. Before the cross of Golgotha the I-glory crumbles into dust; the dying Saviour takes the old Adam with himself into his Death. What more do I desire to be? It is enough to be a poor sinner saved by grace! What do I desire furthermore to possess? "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none on earth that I desire beside thee!" (Psalm 73:25). What do I desire furthermore to enjoy?

"Likewise my desire forever
Art Thou, dearest Lord, alone;
Let me prove unfaithful never,
Dwell within me as my own.
Tho' many go after the world and her pleasures,
In love will I cherish but Thee and Thy treasures;
For Thy words, O Jesus, are spirit and life;
What is there one cannot from Jesus derive?"

May big "I", like Dagon, reclaim its old position again and again? May it cause yet many a sorrow, many a tear? Yes, it may; but by the cross of Calvary it has received a mortal blow in the consequences of which it will at length bleed to death. Even better. We learn to understand the great word of the apostle: "I am crucified with Christ!" I live, indeed, after the outward man, but within me there lives no longer big "I", but Christ alone. "And that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me." Now there applies the rule: Not mine, but Thy will be done. Not unto us the honor, O Lord, but unto Thy Name for ever. Not myself will I love, but Thee, O God, my strength and my power.

"Yea, let my love in deep devotion,
Bathe in love's mighty boundless ocean."

Thus the big "I" is crossed out. Unto such blessed results may the Lord of Love hallow this Holy Week unto all his children.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about,
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Dread fears within, and strife without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, poor wretched, blind,—
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I want—in Thee to find—
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,
Wilt pardon, comfort, cleanse, relieve,
Because Thy promise I believe,—
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, for love unknown
Has broken every barrier down,
Now to be Thine, and Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!
Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY.

Christ, the Vine.

John 15:5.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

This is Maundy Thursday. Maundy means "mandate", i. e. commission. It is the Day of the Remembrance of the great commission given by our Lord Jesus Christ at the institution of the Last Supper, our blessed Holy Communion: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another" (John 13:34). In the old church this was the day of penitence and confession. To us it is the Day of the Memorial. The Holy Sacrament is given, the last passover of the great Sacrifice of God.

The green branches strewn upon the way at our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday previous had dried up, and were scattered to the winds; and with them the shouts of Hosanna had died down, driven from the fickle minds of the multitude.

The leaves of the olive tree and of the fruitful vine in the garden of Gethsemane, however, had spread forth in fresh verdure. Here He, our Lord, had prayed and struggled and won in His final battle, and like an olive-tree, had healed His people with the Samaritan's oil of mercy, and had called Himself

the Vine and His disciples the branches. May this parable become and remain to you an ever-green memorial-leaf on this sacred Thursday, bringing to you two helpful thoughts.

1. It affords—

A PRECIOUS WORD OF COMFORT: *Christ is the vine; in Him and by Him we are to bring forth fruit.*

2. It propounds—

A SERIOUS QUESTION: *Are we branches of this vine?*

Since our Lord has made bread and wine the marks of remembrance of His death, we in the Holy Communion partake, not only of bread and wine, but also *in, with* and *under* these, of the body and blood of Christ. He is the Bread of life, and likewise the Vine.

True, we call the majestic oak the king of the forest; while the oriental boasts of the cedar of Mount Lebanon; but both these are the very ones most exposed to the tempest, and yet no man is safe from the lightning's flash who seeks protection under their shadowy roof. In other words, is man truly safe who seeks protection from the mighty ones of this earth? Is man secure if guarded against serious loss only by his friend's and protector's high position and wealth? When, as in case of the oak, those human supports have given way, when money and goods have vanished, whither shall we turn in the extremities of life, in the storms of distress, in the

anxieties of the soul? There is then but one Plant in which there is true protection, and strength and life; a Plant, whose roots and stem, indeed, appear weak and homely, but whose foliage is fresh and green, whose fruit is the finest on earth—it is the *Vine*. But it is no earthly vine, it is a heavenly Vine. Christ Himself is the Vine.

As the stem and the roots of the new life, he has been transplanted by the Father Himself, the heavenly husbandman, into our earth, after the race of man had become corrupted, after the progenitors of the race were ruined by the poison of sin. Thus has Christ brought back into humanity the divine life which had been lost through disobedience. In His teaching He has afforded us the pure meaning of the Gospel, the very truth. His blood, more precious than the finest old wine, has rejuvenated sin-sick humanity, because in His atonement the new covenant between God and man has been sealed. He has strengthened thousands with His manna from heaven and His vitalizing potion of the sacramental cup; out of the inexhaustible fountain of His divine life He to this day refreshes us in His Holy Supper. Indeed, the heavenly Vine never ceases to pour His life-giving juices into the branches. As an earthly vine's strength in spring-time pours itself in a fresh stream into the tendrils, so will the heavenly Vine, in special seasons of grace, as in the Holy Communion we approach Him, communicate to us in abundant stream His vigor and strength.

Most properly our Lord says: "Whosoever abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." He in us and we in Him—what words of

comfort! Here is not merely a friendly nearness of the Lord, a refreshing intercourse with Him, but, as the Vine's sap penetrates the branches to their utmost tips, so also is the true Communion between Christ and the engrafted soul, *no mere external one,* but a true and real communication of essence on the part of the glorified Son of God to us poor mortals, as says St. Paul: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Yes, He is the Vine; we are the branches.

But *are* we the branches? We have, indeed, all been such—all who have been baptized in His Name. Baptism is the primary tie binding us to Him. It is through Baptism that as branches we were grafted into Him, the Vine. Branches originally, it is true, were we of the old corroded trunk, all born in sin; but now, having been grafted upon the new and holy stem, we are born again in the washing of Holy Baptism. He is the Vine and we the branches—that is something unspeakably great, and yet it expresses our utter insignificance in ourselves. We are not independent trunks; we are only branches, weak, fragile tendrils!

"I am full-aged, I am self-dependent," exclaims one here and one there. And we have an exalted opinion of ourselves in view of our intelligence, our prudence, our good will; and yet how feeble and unimportant must we not feel in even these matters of human pride! How often must we seek advice from our fellowmen, and yet stand unadvised! How limited is our intelligence when intent on conceiving thoughts divine and the miraculous guidances in this life! And

how much more must we acknowledge our infirmity and our helplessnes, when the salvation of our souls is made the issue!

Is it really the power of Christ which impels us? Is *it* the motive-power of all our actions? Is *it* the refreshing wine of Christian doctrine which we ever crave that it may enliven our courage and increase our strength when these grow weary in our wanderings through life over desolate stretches, through doubt and unbelief, through the desert of distress on account of sin and over the ruins of our happiness? Truly, it would be such, if we were true bearing branches on Christ, the Vine.

But, alas! how many do not feel anything of the power of Christ's life pervading them! How many are covered with the withered deformities of sin, and instead of bearing the luscious grapes of Christian works, produce only small and bitter clusters. How often must not the heavenly Husbandman, in order to raise a crop, apply the sharp pruning-knife, often cutting deeply into our flesh by sorrow and sickness which he sends for our discipline! How often must He, with the reaper's scythe, cut off the green twig of hope, which twined around the table in the intimate family-circle, before we become fit for the Kingdom of God! Should we not rather *ourselves* apply the knife in order to cut away the bent and fruitless twigs of selfishness, of the propensity to vanity, the impulse of pride, the fungous growths of vice, the crab-stock of passion? It ever requires self-restraint, to be sure, to cut into one's own flesh, and the heart bleeds whenever we are called upon to resign our wishes, our evil inclinations and lusts

in obedience to God's commandments, even though it is for good.

But does not the vine, too, bleed in spring-time before it puts forth fruit? Did not Christ bleed on the cross when He secured our eternal salvation? Blessed are ye, young Christians, if even now you labor for your own betterment, and with holy zeal strive to show forth the right fruit in due season. Blessed are you, older Christians, if in good time you turn to God who has patience with you as long as you seek His communion, as long as you desire to be branches of Christ, the heavenly Vine. Would God that none of us should ever be like the cut-off branch of which it is said that it is cast into the fire!

So come, then, to the Table of the Lord with holy earnestness and a firm resolution that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, you will endeavor to lead better lives, so that in His day you may be enabled to drink anew of the fruit of the Vine, the pure Gospel in the Kingdom of the Father. May God bless to all our souls the Holy Supper!

Bread of heaven, on Thee we feed,
For Thy flesh is meat indeed;
Ever may our souls be fed
With this true and living Bread.

Vine of heaven, Thy Blood supplies
This blest cup of sacrifice;
Lord, Thy wounds our healing give;
To Thy Cross we look and live.

Day by day with strength supplied,
Through the life of Him who died,
Lord of life, O let us be
Rooted, grafted, built on Thee.
Amen.

THE IMPOTENCE OF SIN.

GOOD FRIDAY
1

Mark 14:41.

And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Blessed faith enabled at this Passiontide to soar above all the sorrow of earth to the heights of light eternal; blessed faith, to have found the Saviour on Calvary's hill, and like the Passionflower to twine about the cross; blessed faith which, like the Divine Sufferer in Gethsemane, in enduring love gives practical proof, wrests away from the power of sin, conquering all temptation! In temptation alone faith is proven true. When sin manifests its power, faith, too, must reveal its strength. True, sin often is paramount. In order to overcome in the struggle against sin, man must realize its power, fathom its intention. By so doing he will at last find its real weakness over against the workings of the Holy Spirit. So let us discuss—

THE IMPOTENCE OF SIN.

We ask: What means does sin employ in order

to conquer? When does it operate for attaining its ends? What does it accomplish?

Jesus stands among his enemies in attitude majestic. We here witness a drama concerning which we must acknowledge that an awful and heinous deception is being perpetrated. What are they going to do with the beloved, holy Master of Israel? Can they convict Him of one sin? No! They must try to catch him in his words, they must bring up false witnesses, they must hide behind sophisms and fraud. Is not that proof sufficient that sin is impotent, that it lacks courage, that it stoops to cowardice? People representing evil must choose by-paths for the practice of their wickedness. "Art Thou the Christ?" they ask Him. If he says, "I am", they will file charges against Him for blasphemy. If He says, "I am not," why does He instigate the people to defection from their rulers? Has He not said that he would displace the religion of Abraham? Has he not made bold to destroy the temple and to rebuild it in three days?

The rabble raves: "He is guilty of death!" Blind mob. It judges from appearance. Might goes before right, and when superior force overcomes the adversary, sin deems itself victor. The enemies of Jesus know full well that the Master will not permit himself to be charged with a crime. They are convinced likewise that the better-minded among them are not to be deceived. There remains but one loophole: to deceive themselves and the obtuse masses. They dig up everything from the past, the trifling incidents. Is not that another evidence of the impotence of sin? The enemies of Jesus, the rulers

of the Jews put on disguise, feigning a righteous cause.

We draw our conclusion: What means does sin employ in order to conquer? Being in bondage, after all, to a higher world-order, it must take to the by-path.

An honorable man uses no oblique ways, chooses no indirect means. He has the courage of stepping firmly and directly; he is able to face his opponent. Let us ever act conscientiously, and we shall require no underhand dealings as a means to an end.

Look upon Christ. He freely faces his enemies when they approach to lay hold on Him. Modern society has contrived a terminology in the use of which flatteries are spoken while the mind harbors very opposite thoughts. Mockery is played out, where seriousness should have a place. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." Hold up to your children this Lord and Master. Let it be inscribed indelibly on our hearts for a constant reminder: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2 5).

2) When does sin operate for the attaining to its ends?

It was NIGHT when the emissaries of those criminal, hypocritical rulers were delegated to arrest the humble Jesus. Without delay the prisoner was given a hearing. Vain proved their attempt to wrest a confession from His lips. Reading the events of that night in the Gospels, we find these words of Jesus addressed to his disciples: "The hour is come. Be-

hold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

"Thou wouldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above," says the Christ to Pilate. Sin cannot operate whenever it desires, but only when God permits it. Sin avails itself of the hour of darkness. Is not that a sign of impotence? Once more the fact is apparent: sin is bound to a higher, moral world-order.

We, too, have our ordeal; it comes of a surety to all, the hour of evil. But think not that the world arranges for these hours, and that you can perpetrate evil whenever you choose to do so; remember, rather, that in the moment you elect to deviate from the ways of God, He, too, has a hand in the game. By his permission evil is done, but He ever longs to overrule it for good. *You* are to be alarmed by the consequences of sin.

The congregation has its days of test. The country records days of national affliction, of sorrow, of trial, of temptation. Look at these after-war days. God is being forgotten. Evil and its power abound. Neither police nor courts are able to cope with it and curb it. One evil eradicated, another looms up, not to mention those which these representatives of justice do not want to combat. And God permits it.

When in times past the church was put to the test —and I think we are living in such a time now— when evil influences sought to destroy it, these efforts transpired under God's eyes, and He permitted of them. So He allows perverse powers to flourish for

the time being in order the more readily, in His own time, to check their spreading beyond the boundaries of His permission.

Again you see a proof of sin's impotence, that a halt is put to it that a barrier is placed in its way, which it cannot overcome by efforts never so strenuous.

At the close of our life we will look back upon hours of temptation and realize the impotence of sin. As those rulers sent out their deputies into the garden of Gethsemane, thus sin delegates its messengers for us to discern that the hour of temptation is upon us. A well-meant design is this in the Providence of God, for our Saviour says: "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

3) In conclusion let us ask and answer the question: what does sin accomplish?

Looking upon Jerusalem Jesus said: "How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" You have misinterpreted my words. You have misunderstood my thoughts. Therefore, in the hour in which sin will unfold its greatest power, it will be evident that I gain the victory. Sin must serve the counsel of God for the revelation of His glory. On Golgotha where Jesus bowed His head, new life blossoms forth. Is not this the clearest proof of the impotence of sin that this very place, Golgotha, where sin seemed to triumph, became the emanation-point of the dawn of a

new era? Wrapped in darkness were the skies when Jesus hung upon the cross, but lo! it proved the final darkness. From that hour a clear light sends forth its radiant effulgence from the cross of Golgotha over the whole universe. When those murderers dragged Jesus to His death, they accomplished nothing less than to bring about the glory of the Saviour in spite of themselves. Intending to render service to the counsel of the Jews, they are forced to render service to the counsel of God. Thus these very executioners became the cause of the curse resting upon Israel. In that day the national disaster of the Jews had its inception, and by the very contempt of salvation on the part of Israel the Gospel became the world-religion. The heathen had a foreboding of redemption to come. We have the monuments of olden days pointing to such a hope. The tower of Babylon is one of them. The Gospel must conquer. Being the work of God, it cannot be quelched. Let no fear of the victory of sin prevail. Golgotha is the guarantee of the victory of the good. "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"!

O Thou, from whom all goodness flows,
I lift my heart to Thee,
In all my sorrows, conflicts, woes,
Good Lord, remember me!

When on my aching, burdened heart
My sins lie heavily,
My pardon speak, new peace impart;
Good Lord, remember me!

When trials sore obstruct my way,
And ills I cannot flee;
O let my strength be as my day;
Good Lord, remember me!

When in the solemn hour of death
I wait Thy just decree;
Be this the prayer of my last breath:
Good Lord, remember me!

And when before Thy throne I stand
And lift my soul to Thee,
Then, with the saints at Thy right hand,
Good Lord, remember me!

Amen.

*GOOD FRIDAY.**
2.

"THEY CRUCIFIED HIM."

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him."—Luke xxiii: 33.

"A race fallen! A world in ruins!" When this dread announcement was made in heaven, the Blessed Trinity met in solemn conference. We know not where in the illimitable universe, nor when in the cycles of eternity, nor how in the processes of God, but this we know: the deliverance of Adam's race is determined upon. The question is asked, "Whom shall we send?" The Only Begotten Son of God offers Himself. "Here am I, send Me."

The palace gates of His Heavenly home were closed behind Him and He descended into this sin-stricken world.

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

And now appears from amidst the vanishing shadows of the old economy the sign of the Cross. Its shadow falls upon the God-man. It had often been symbolized to God's chosen people. When the

*Published before in Echoes from the Sanctuary.

dying patriarch Jacob blessed his grandsons the crossing of his hands was significant as was also the crossing of the hands over the scapegoat. There was a typical reference in the wave-offerings of the tabernacle and temple, which were so waved as to make the form of a cross appear; and the transverse spits which the priest placed in the pascal lamb evidently prefigured the cross of the Redeemer.

The cross was to the ancient world an instrument of shame. We, on the other hand, have it wrought in gold and worn as an ornament and placed at the head of all symbolisms, until we have transfigured it. It is our boast. Originally it was only a symbol of shame, meaner than the gallows or the guillotine. It meant not only death, but an ignominious death—a death reserved among the Romans for slaves only. No wonder, then, that "the preaching of the cross" was to the unconverted Jew a "stumbling-block" and to the polished Greeks "foolishness." And yet in God's plan of salvation it was the preaching of the cross that conquered the world.

Constantine the Great abolished crucifixion in the Roman Empire, and since that time the practice has

"Faithful cross, above all others
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be:
Sweetest wood, and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee."*

* Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla talem silva profert
Fronde, flore, germine:
Dulce lignum, dulces clavi,
Dulce pondus sustinens.

gradually disappeared. No longer a symbol of shame, the cross has now become a symbol of glory. Well may we exclaim with Fortunatus in his famous Passion-hymn:

I. *The Doctrine of the Cross is the sum and substance of the Scriptures.*

In the centre of all that is in the Bible stands the cross. All the Old Testament points down to it, and all the New Testament points back to it. What meant the altar reared at the very gates of Eden? It meant the vicarious atonement. It meant the cross. What meant the blood sprinkled on the door-posts when the destroying angel went through the land of Egypt? It meant vicarious atonement. It meant the cross. What meant the uplifted pole and brazen serpent? It meant the cross. What did Isaiah mean by saying, "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows"? The seer was gazing at Golgotha and he spoke of the cross. The Bible is the Book of the cross. It was this that constrained Paul at Corinth to determine "not to know anything, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." He saw that without the cross the Old Testament is confused, enigmatic and meaningless. He saw that all the ways of God's revelation converged and met at the cross. Standing under the cross the apostle saw how the "law and the prophets" were one, whole, harmonious unfolding of God's redeeming idea and its historical introduction into the world. Take out of the Bible the atoning sacrifice of Christ and it will no longer be a power unto salvation. You might as well take the sun out of the solar system; in either case you would soon have nothing left.

II. *The Cross of Christ is the Pivot of History.*

All the light of secular as well as sacred story gathers round its head sublime. The records of history are a bewildering maze looked at from every point of view but one. Our solar system is apparently without a plan, but if we could have the viewpoint of the sun it would be evident that there was no confusion; the orbit of every planet falling into the harmony of the perfect whole. In the same way the mysteries of this world's career, whether we look upon the past or endeavor to gaze into the future, can only perplex us until we take our stand at the foot of the cross. Just as the cross is the summing up of all revelation, so it is the summing up of the world's history. Thickening folds of oblivion wrap the past, and its mighty names become forgotten, nations flourish and decay, kingdoms rise and fall; but the figure of the cross stands out solitary against the background of the past.

And here we have an earnest of the final victory of the cross. It is related by Eusebius that when Emperor Constantine prayed that some god would aid him in the campaign against Maxentius, a luminous cross appeared in the heavens, emblazoned with these words, *"By this sign thou shalt conquer!"** *And* so he did; and ever after the cross was displayed as the banner of the Caesars. The symbol of suffering and defeat has assumed the glory of an incorruptible crown. Though the true power of the cross is not external, yet it is strengthening to our faith to note how this spiritually transforming force is even externally to govern the world.

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*In hoc signo vinces.

III. *The Cross is practically the sum and substance of Christianity.*

The Old Testament was not a final revelation. That for which the way was prepared during centuries, and to proclaim the advent of which men like Isaiah and Ezekiel were sent, was the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified. The vital centre of the teachings of Christ was His vicarious death. We have no Gospel to preach that does not cluster about the atonement made by Jesus Christ on the cross. Strenuous endeavors have been made to make of the Sermon on the Mount an ethical creed which might serve as a basis for a federation of all believers in Christ. The suggestion is satanic, inasmuch as the Sermon on the Mount is only a fragment of the teachings of Christ. There is no mention made here of redemptive mercy—of the necessity of the cross; and yet the cross, gloomy and grand, ever lifted itself before the mind of Jesus; He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem knowing that the great end for which He came into the world was that He should die on the cross. Without the story of the crucifixion the teachings of Jesus would indeed have been only a code of ethics—the most beautiful the world ever knew, it is true, but no more. Christ was not the moral founder of a code of ethics, a reformer or an example of holiness. It was above all an offering for sin. Even on Christmas morning, the Christian preacher will also say, "Let us go even unto Calvary." Without the cross Christ would not be a power unto salvation.

IV. *The Cross of Christ answers the universal need of mankind.*

Sin is a tremendous fact. It has defiled the world, estranged man from his Heavenly Father,

"Brought death into the world and all our woe."

Man has sinned, and man must die. The sword of justice is lifted over him. But hold, a Deliverer appears! As He comes down from the shining ranks, He cries, "I will be the ransom. I will descend into the world of sin, and dwelling in flesh, and yielding up my life a sacrifice in his behalf, man shall live." Thus our hope of eternal life began in the interposition of the Son of God. On the cross He died to make atonement for man's sins. Mercy did not screen man at the expense of justice, for in the Crucified One the divine attribute of justice and the divine attribute of mercy harmoniously met. And now, when I hear a voice from "the excellent glory" saying, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me," then I look up and begin to see how a sinner may live. When I read, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," then I begin to see how a sinner may live. When I turn my eyes to Calvary, see Him in His mortal agony, and learn the cause of this to be that "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," then I cry, "That is what I need—Christ and Him crucified!"

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah!"

Christ died, not as a martyr only, sealing His testimony with His blood; nor as an example only, leading

the way to God; nor simply as a manifestation of God to bring us to repentance—but He died as an expiatory sacrifice. He came "to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness."

How was it possible that many could be justified by the death of One? Paul ascribes the efficacy of His death to the greatness of the Sufferer. "How much more," says he, "shall the blood of Christ who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot unto God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" It meant much to speak of the Son of God as "offering Himself unto God." It meant more to speak of Him as offering "Himself unto God without a spot." It meant still more when he speaks of this offering as being "through the eternal Spirit." If He who offered Himself was the eternal God, we may well tremble and rejoice. There can be no limit to the efficacy of His death.

The Cross brings God near to man. To preach the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is the surest way to draw near unto God those that are afar off. It is a blessed thing to preach Christ glorified, but Christ's second coming was never intended to take the place of Christ's crucifixion. The blazing light of the second advent does not obscure the milder radiance and more healing beams of the first advent. Standing under the cross we feel that the Heavenly Father is very near us. We "are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

The Cross convinces of sin. Look at Jesus. He did no sin, but only took upon Himself the sins of

others. How did it fare with Him? Only by becoming accursed before God in our stead was the purchase price of salvation actually paid. Not sinners slightly guilty, but sinners irretrievably lost, made the great atoning sacrifice necessary. Sin is the only thing God abhors; it brought Christ to the cross; it damns the soul; it shuts heaven.

The Cross melts the hearts of those who believe. The death of Jesus, with its infinite anguish, is such a demonstration of God's love that it moves the heart that has become insensible to all else. The well-known story of Colonel Gardiner's conversation illustrates the power of the cross to melt the heart. After a Sunday of dissipation he fell asleep and dreamed that he saw, suspended in the air, a vivid representation of the Savior on the cross. Distinctly he heard a voice saying, "This I did for thee: what hast thou done for Me?" He awoke, and filled with contrition he sought and found pardon and peace.

The Cross brings us into peace with God. If we firmly believe that Jesus became the surety, the sacrifice, the substitute for men, then out of this belief there grows love to God, as well there might. Did He die for us? Then His love hath mastered me, and henceforth it holds me a willing captive.

When the Cross was erected on Calvary, the earth heaved, the veil of the temple was rent, the sheeted dead were awakened from their slumbers, and the sun in terror veiled his face. The cross has lost none of its power. The sinner sheeted and dead in iniquity will be shaken wherever the cross is lifted up. Wherever a repentant sinner cries out from the encircling

gloom, the cross, if it be but lifted up, will pierce the darkness with its radiance. It was this which gave peace to the troubled soul of Martin Luther in the monastery of Erfurt. It became to him the power of God and through him to millions. The cross transfigures life. The wounded hand holds out the chalice from which we quench the soul's thirst; a loving face looks down from the sky and every moment is a sacred earnest of eternity. Thus is the gloom of the accursed tree transformed into the splendor of a victor's chariot.

"Worthy is the Lamb which was slain:" thus sing the redeemed in heaven. Angels repeat the triumphant strain; and you, ye blood-bought sons of Adam, praise Him too.

EARLY EASTER.

THE HOLY SEPULCHRE.

Mark 15: 46-47.

And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. And Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.

Good Friday evening ushers us from Calvary-Hill to a quiet garden, planted with olive-trees, cypresses and palms. There we find a new tomb, hewn in rocky cliff. Jesus' body is the first to be laid therein. A small procession moves thitherward. The new faithful ones, the eye-witnesses of the spectacle on Calvary, carry the Master's remains. Several women form the retinue. The body is laid to rest, a stone is rolled to the entrance of the sepulchre.

Many a fierce battle has been fought since then for the possession of this sacred spot. Christian and Moslem in the middle ages contended here in the crusades. To-day there towers a church, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, so-called, above the place assumed to be Christ's grave. The true spot is still a matter of contention. We tonight gladly repress the desire, so natural in many Christian

hearts, who love the Christ, to view those regions where Jesus suffered and was buried, because at every Easter season these holy places are scenes of wild fanaticism and offensive tumult. To us, who have stood at the graves of our beloved ones

THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

is a place of silent mourning and of blessed comfort.

1) The sun, which, at the demise of the Son of God during the hours from twelve to three had lost its lustre, has now gone down in the west. Utterly desolate lies the hill of Golgotha. Three crosses stand still erect on the spot which witnessed the most remarkable event of all times. The olive-trees of Gethsemane, among which the fervent prayers and sighs of the divine Sufferer had been heard in the night before, the waters of brook Cedron, the witness of his bitter tears, the palm-trees and the cypresses around the tomb, murmur one to another, it would seem, in the cool of the evening breezes: "It is finished."

In Joseph's garden sleeping, the loving Saviour true
Rests from all strife and struggle He fought for me and you.
They bedded Him, so weary, for undisturbed rest
The Father's peace His cover, guardians the angels blessed.

The silvery moon, in the dim light of which the pinnacles of the temple on Mt. Moriah and the outlines of the Mount of Olives stand out from the horizon in bold relief, sheds its light also through the silvergrey foliage upon the silent death-chamber and upon the heavily-veiled form of a woman, seated there —Mary of Magdala. Having been a witness of the agony on the cross, she cannot leave the sacred place

in which all her hope lies buried. Once more she visualizes the Master's loving ministry, the benevolent kindness to herself especially, unmerited as it was. And that last look, so full of pain and yet of love undying—and death itself, at length! We can feel with her the bitter woe piercing her compassionate soul, for we are wont to sing:

> O Lord! It was my burden
> That brought this woe on Thee!

The word of the prophet is moved on the screen in plain sight: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows!" And all this on our account and for our eternal good.

But the Holy Sepulchre is to us a place of silent mourning, when we stand with tear-dimmed eyes at the graves of our loved ones.

"Death harbors purifying powers." Beautiful saying! In Christ, however, there was no need of purifying powers. His life was undefiled, sinless. In His death there is revealed the full strength of resigned endurance, yea, a super-human, divine strength, in which He suffered pains most penetrating, and wrestled through all of them, even though forsaken by the Father—an experience He could not be spared—to that last Word on the cross, so trustful, so sure of victory: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Who dieth thus, dies well. We, poor, sinful creatures, however, are in need of the purifying powers reposing in death.

Before the majesty of death all sorrow and pain caused by the departed in our lives stand back; their

weaknesses, their sins are not thought of. The bereaved are inclined rather to charge themselves with lack of love and patience. The dead appear in transfigured guise. An old Latin saying reads: *De mortuis nil nisi bene,* i. e., speak nought but good about the dead. The funeral oration was termed "laudatio", i. e., a discourse of praise. It is not always a simple matter for the minister to say words of praise at the funeral service of the ungodly, the atheist. Yet was not the departed, in spite of all his frailty, perhaps a father, who loved his children? Did he not have friends, to whom now and then he showed kindness and benevolence? Woe to that man at whose grave there is no grief, who is not worth a tear! How much greater, how much more justified, however, the mourning for the departed who sowed and reaped love, whose departure created a vacancy in the circle of loved ones, never to be filled! Who can replace a faithful, grateful son, a beloved daughter; a father, a mother, who is unselfish, sacrificial love did all in their power for their children? Who can replace the husband, or the wife, if in true love they had been united.

Weep then, appease your longing and vent your heart's deep grief,
Your tears of faith are seed-corns for flowers of relief

The tear shed at the grave is like the dew which revives the wilting blossom. In the dew of tears there is surcease, recreation for all those human flowers, trembling lilies, broken in spirit, languishing in the heat of tribulation. Will you chide Mary on account of her tears for the beloved Son, the best friend of man, when at the sepulchre she tarries in prayer?

Was not your experience the same, when your babe drew its last breath? Was it not a sword piercing your soul? Was it not a day of extreme sadness, when the inanimate form was carried out to God's acre? What a thorny path! How often are they not visited, those last resting places of our dead! Fresh flowers, new tears! Yet natural and warranted as may be our sorrow, we need not mourn as those who have no hope.

2) The Holy Sepulchre into which our Saviour was laid, must be to all who mourn at the graves of loved ones, a blessed place of comfort. Do you not think that Mary obtained the comfort she sought?

Go then with all your grieving home for your Sabbath rest,
And let your soul be stablished to give faith's surest test.
A day of cares may burden, a night's distress so deep—
Then Easter dawns! Peace enters! We ask: Why do you weep?

All around the Holy Sepulchre, what budding, what new verdure and promise of life, timidly the little spring-flowers stretch their little heads. What resurrection from bleak winter's grave preparing in nature! Does it not, like psaltery and harp, chime lowly, yet sweetly even through Good Friday night: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." We know that dark Good Friday, when Jesus was laid away in His death-chamber, was followed by an Easter morning, bright and clear, when the door of the grave became the portal of triumph to eternal life. We know how the women on that first Easter morning found the stone rolled away. We remember how Mary Magdalene, upon her plaint: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they

have laid Him," received from angel's lips the assuring message: "He is not here, He is risen!" We know how Jesus revealed Himself in person.

Miracles of resurrection happen no longer, as we know. No departed son is returned to his mother; no brother rises from the grave as did Lazarus; no child is called back to life like Jairus' daughter, because the word of Jesus is heard no longer: "I say unto thee, arise," even though many a severe illness is turned to recovery by the grace of God through prayer. Yet since Jesus' tomb has opened, since the Risen One has revealed Himself in His glorified body, the Prince of Life, He still approaches the mourning ones, though unknown, as He was on the way to Emmaus, and causes bereft hearts to burn, hailing them: "Weep not"! At our graves there comes to mind the angelic question: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" And the blessed assurance likewise: "He is not here; He is risen!" The sign of victory upon the graves of our beloved is the cross. It reminds us of Him, who has said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though, he were dead, yet shall He live." The grave is the stepping-stone to heaven. Winged hope soars to the land of peace and joy. In the garden of the Christian heart there thrives many a precious fruit of the Spirit of patience and peace, moistened by the dew of tears. There blossom the sweet violet of humility, the star-flower of faith, the rose of Sharon, affectionate concord, the Easter lily of tranquility.

To this day we sing comfort to our hearts:

> No profit canst thou gain
> By self-consuming care;

To Him commend thy cause; His ear
Attends the softest prayer.

Prayer, indeed, is the only availing recourse in our sorrow. We must pray ourselves free from sorrow and trust in God more than in our own strength. The waters of eternal life flow from the Holy Sepulchre like a dashing spring from the Rock.

What in harrowing hour below
Ever our heart assails,
In salvation's stream does flow
Never more our life to ail.
There is ceasing for all fears,
Wiped away are all our tears,
No more sorrow, no distress,
All is blessed forgetfulness.
Amen.

EASTER-FORENOON.

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH!

Job 19:25.

For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

Three days of joy Christianity observes above all others. And this is a good thing. The world has no right to jeer and mock and say: "You Christians are a sad people; you have no joys." What the world calls joy is not joy to us. It is to us a mere scintillation which, like the sky-rocket, bursts in the air and vanishes, or may cause a destructive fire.

This applies to the best joys of earth. Earthly joys are not every man's portion. Millions of people simply vegetate without a spark of joy in life. These call themselves the disinherited mass. Become a Christian, however, and you no longer belong to the class of disinherited ones. The Christian has an inheritance most glorious and eternal, the inheritance of the saints in light. And this is joy eternal, intended for every man, especially for the distressed and poor. It is not meant merely for a select few. Christians, we may hail: "Rejoice always!" He who wrote these words was a sick old man, in prison

for two long years. We may "rejoice always" because of our inheritance.

Easter, like no other day, preaches this joy: Rejoice, O Christendom! Three times we are enjoined thus to rejoice: at Christmas, at Easter, at Pentecost. At Christmas we understood the injunction most easily. Joy is general then. At Easter our joy is more hidden, a more reserved one. It finds an echo in such hearts only as are given to the Christ.

It is the property of those who have been at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday, who have sung:

> My burden in Thy Passion,
> Lord, Thou hast borne for me.

They are able to join in the Easter chorus:

> Christ the Lord is risen again!
> Christ has broken death's strong chain!
> Hark, the angels shout for joy:
> (Singing ever more on High) Hallelujah!

They know, too, that Easter is the foundation of all true Christian joy. "Jesus lives, and with Him I," is the expression of this joy. Or in the words of the Old Covenant: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" That which originated at Christmas had its consummation at Easter.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth," was the confession from Job's lips, that believer of old. It was his Easter-faith, his Easter-assurance. This, to be sure, had nothing in common as yet with Jesus. And it is to me really a source of satisfaction that the Old Testament does not say much of the Resurrection.

It could not be otherwise. It is a proof positive that it is divine truth. If the patriarchs, prophets and poets in the days of Noah, or Moses perchance, had had the knowledge of the resurrection, the unbelief of the disciples would be inconceivable and unnatural; in that case their message concerning the Risen One would not have excited the entire Jewish world.

The Old Testament is not a finished product placed by Jehovah into the hands of the Jews, with all sorts of revelations, concerning heavenly things and deeds divine. It is not a text-book in the ordinary sense. It was collated by degrees; it grew like a tree which spreads its branches wider and wider, increasing toward heaven, presaging fruit in due course only, at the time of the harvest. Among these branches and twigs, the branch of the hope of the resurrection sprouted toward the last with its precious fruit.

Now and then we find an apprehension, a hidden expression: "Thou wilt not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption." (Psalm 16:10); "He hath swallowed up death forever" (Isa. 25:8); "Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise" (Isa. 26:19); "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). And in the book of the Maccabees (2, 7:14): "This is great comfort, namely, our hope that though men slay us, God will raise us anew."

Yet all these are but dim rays, hardly penetrating the shadows of death, casting a faint light, so that eminent minds among the people only caught its re-

flection, and thus fostered a silent hope for their latter end. How did such thoughts originate in the hearts of men? All around them in the world they witnessed dying and vanishing. Flowers will bloom again every spring, yet some day they will have bloomed for the last time and decay. The trees will put forth new verdure every year; yet some day they will wither and fall, and be consigned to man's use. Let the proud cedar become a mast and travel the seas—it is dead; whither is gone the life it had in the days when it stood in the forest, when the evening breezes rustled through its needles and the cunning squirrel skidded amid its branches?

Notwithstanding, there runs mysteriously through all nations the longing for life eternal, often clad in strange figures, as, for instance, in the superstition of the migration of the soul. This, however, is no resurrection unto the true life. The true apprehension first rose in Israel as the red morning sky preceding the sun. The Pharisees in Jesus' day all lived in the hope of such a dawn. The sun himself did not rise until the victorious Easter-assurance had become a fact: "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" As our confession of faith we cannot put it more fittingly than in the word of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

When he uttered this sentence, Job was in the midst of direst sorrow. He had lost all his children, his possessions were scattered to the winds, he himself was sick, and so disfigured as to be loathsome; his friends, yea his own wife, were against him, a mockery of the people—he was pushed almost to the

brink of despair as regards God's justice and kindness.

And yet he holds fast, and braves all storms, knowing that God lives, and as his Redeemer will reveal Himself in time, vindicate him in this very temporal life of his. This is his light in all the darkness around him. When all others become unfaithful, God is and remains true; He cannot forsake me altogether. "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Job came forth victorious from his distress. God be praised! His word has been fulfilled in a still higher sense than he anticipated.

Rarely have human hearts experienced a darker time than did the disciples of Jesus from Good Friday evening to Sunday morning. It was a dreary Sabbath to them, pouring chill of death into the warmth of their faith and hope; consuming unrest bordering on despair had broken up their peace. Behind locked doors they hid themselves in fearful anxiety. Their life-light was extinguished, their holiest hope blown away like the dry leaf before an autumnal storm. *Their Faith*—had it been an illusion? *Their Love*—alas, it still glowed within their hearts, but the Beloved One had been torn from them; Jesus, their Master, their Messiah lay in the grave! Their Messiah! *Was He such?* Had He not claimed it? Had He not blessed Peter for his great confession? "We had hoped that it was He who should redeem Israel!" And now? O, boundless grief, when the one we loved lies before us in death!

And they had lost more, much more. Jesus had

been more to them than the dearest friend, brother, husband—He had been their Redeemer, their Savior. Was that now all over? Could it be? Jesus dead! The very thought must have seized them like a nightmare. The man without sin, the Holy One of God, the Son of God, who had healed the sick, given reason to the insane, cleansed sinners, yea, and raised the dead and brought the Kingdom of God; the One whom they had seen transfigured in divine splendor. True, He had predicted His death on the cross, but the reality had come all too sudden, and was a terrible blow to their faith. Besides, they had never been able to believe it. They were like sheep scattered without a shepherd, for their Shepherd was slain.

The second fearful night falls upon them. They are unable to sleep. Anxious questions disturb their hearts. No solution, no light. The morning dawns. A few of the women go out to anoint the body of the dead. A few days ago Mary of Bethany had anointed the *Living Master*. How they murmered on account of the waste! O, these reminiscences! They all had sinned against Him. Not alone Judas! All! They had forsaken Him.

What is that? Hasty steps on the outside! Enter the women, Johanna and Mary, the mother of James, breathless. What light shines in their eyes: "The stone is rolled away! The tomb is empty!" Impossible! An angel at the tomb has told us: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Imagination, foolishness, phantasy! The very experience of such as are saved from death's peril unexpectedly! They cannot believe. So little prepared and inclined to

believe are they, these disciples of Jesus? AND THESE SHOULD HAVE INVENTED THE TALE OF THE RESURRECTION? Never! Solely the light of the sun penetrates the morning mist. John rushes in: "The tomb is empty. Peter, too, has seen it. Jesus lives! I believe it." And was John, too, in a trance? Should there be something to it? And Peter?

The hours flee as if they were seconds. There is Peter among them at last, hardly to be recognized, as if newly born. What report to their utter excitement, does he bring? "I have seen him!" Peter, thou art mad! But there is no respite from surprise. Mary Magdalene enters, her face resplendent like an angel's. "I have seen the Lord. He called me by my name. He commissioned me to tell you to meet Him in Galilee."

The day is on the wane. Nameless joy hovers over them. It seems as if it did not yet dare to seize their hearts, for faith still stands at the door and knocks. And again the door opens, and the two disciples of Emmaus greet them with glad jubilation, reporting what they already know, yet there is something new: "He expounded to us the Scriptures, teaching that He *had* to suffer thus and enter into His glory. We recognized Him by the breaking of bread."

They are like the captivity of Zion now; their mouth filled with laughter; their tongues with singing.

Then suddenly Jesus Himself stands in the midst of them saying, "Peace be with you!" Their hearts

tremble and burn. Yes, it is He! Or is it but His Spirit? No, spirits do not speak thus: "Why are ye fearful? It is I!" Spirits have not flesh and bone. He eats with them as in the days of old. It is reality. It is truth. They hardly dared to believe for joy indescribable. Something of this joy many years afterwards vibrates in Peter's message: "Ye will rejoice with unspeakable joy when there is revealed Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:8). His experience of the day he comprehends in the throbbing words: "Begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!" (1 Peter 1:3).

This was the greatest day in the history of man. A greater one will dawn, when the earth will be at Jesus' feet, as were then the little flock of disciples. Then we will have the World-Easter, and all flesh will know that Jesus lives! Until then—2000 years have come and gone—there will be a steadily growing church, in which every believing soul knows and confesses the Easter-Creed: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

Is this your Easter-joy? It could not be as intensive as that of Jesus' first disciples. We have known the message from childhood. We cannot appreciate His life, having never lost Him. And perhaps we have never owned Him in such a way as that His loss would expunge our joy. But we are not supposed to measure our Easter-assurance according to the intensity of our feelings of joy. Peter afterwards had many a sorrow. Unadulterated joy is our portion only on the high-spots of life or after severest pain. But surely there are none of us who

will not confess with all their heart: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

Mind you, not "I believe," "I hope," but, "I KNOW! "It must be a fact, and it IS a fact; otherwise our faith, our hope, profits us nothing; otherwise "we are," to speak with Paul, "of all men most miserable."

How do we know it? We have not seen Him. Easter-faith is the evidence of things not seen. The visible is temporal and transient. The invisible is eternal, as God is invisible and eternal. Therefore, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." But not on this account only. This were only reasoning. Over against sin, over against death, we crave more. Yes, we crave that Jesus, our Redeemer should live. And this fact you may experience every day when your hour is at hand. Let Him redeem you, and you will *know*. What life is, *He* only knows, who lives, who experiences life; thus you can experience your Savior in your life only. Not by digging and searching in the Scriptures alone will you sense His presence. It happens only if you *GIVE HIM YOUR HEART* that He may free you from all bonds, from sin and guilt. Then you will revive, receive new life, and you will know: *"I AM REDEEMED!"*

You are in need of redemption. You are in bondage. The disciples were in the bondage of anxiety, fear, misery; they were troubled about their hope, their faith, their salvation, their life. Is not there some fetter to bind you? Some care, some anxiety, whether you are rich or poor? Are we not all slaves more or less to the spirit of the times? Are we not

afraid of it? There is but one Redeemer upon whom to cast our cares: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

I have in mind stronger bonds, the bonds of dull pain, when our beloved dies; one hope after the other, like a falling star, wanes in the sky of life, when the good we wanted turns out evil; when love has been sown and ingratitude harvested; when discouragement and contempt of men rise up within and the sore heart lies in chains threatening to choke the love of our fellowmen. And the deepest woe of all is that so much within us dies and is dead—so much that once stood in fullest bloom, so much energy broken, so much time wasted, so much good lost. Oh, be redeemed from this woe of death! Come to Jesus, your Redeemer, who will burst all bonds.

I know of still stronger chains; the old guilt, and new sins without number! Who can be rid of his past which is ever before us and threatens to become the judgment of the future? Who is stronger than his inborn, feeble or evil nature? Who can master his lovelessness and carnal lusts, his selfishness and hardness of heart? Who does not shrink from these shadows and dark forces? To whom is the thought of Cain, a stranger: "My punishment is greater than I can bear?"

> In the midst of fear of hell,
> In sin and strife,
> Where is safety, where the well
> To refresh this life?
> Christ, our life, the shelter gives:
> I know that my Redeemer lives!

He prayed for Simon Peter. He forgave Thomas. He removes all fetters saying: "I will, be thou

clean!" "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Thou liv'st, Thou liv'st, O Hero true,
The Conqueror of Death!
The sinner's thanks to Thee are due
Until the latest breath.
The Savior choose,
Sin's load you lose,
The Easter sun brings life, salvation
And everlasting exultation!

"I know that my Redeemer liveth!" Hallelujah! Amen.

THE JOYFUL SUNDAY.

*EASTER AFTERNOON.**

"Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."
—John xx: 20.

"It is finished!" cried the Crucified One and bowed His head and died.

The day following was the saddest day the world ever saw. The broken-hearted disciples cowered in lonely chambers in Jerusalem. They had hoped that Jesus was He who should redeem Israel, and lo, He died an ignominious death. The cross gave them a disappointment sadder than ever had fallen on men before; sadder than any since. It was the bitterest blighting of hopes in the history of humanity.

How precious to them must have been the tidings that He was, indeed, risen from the dead. On the evening of the day of His resurrection they saw Him with their own eyes and, in the words of our text, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." "Sad Friday" with its disappointment and gloom was forgotten. Holy joy filled their hearts to overflowing.

Centuries have come and gone since men began to call Easter *Dominica Gaudii*—the joyful Sunday. In

*Published before in Echoes from the Sanctuary.

the primitive Church it was the greatest festival of the Christian year. When Christian met Christian in the streets of Rome he hailed him with the salutation, "Christ is risen," and the answer came back, "He is risen indeed!"

So men have felt that by way of pre-eminence "the joyful Sunday" eclipsed all other high days whatsoever. It enwraps the remembrance of an occurrence, that has done more for us than any other event that has ever taken place. It is the brightest with hope and joy.

"For you—for me—for all that sleep;
For hearts that sing—for hearts that weep,
Christ is risen."

Blessed, glorious Easter! We do well to pray, "Lift up our hearts," while we meditate on the great truths which make it the dearest, most hopeful day of the year.

I. *We rejoice because the Christhood of Jesus is now firmly established.* The disciples were glad to see their Lord again, for now the mystery of the cross and the grave was becoming clear to them. They had "trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," but the crucifixion and death of their Lord had almost bereft them of faith and hope. Now the promise of the resurrection was vividly recalled. He was indeed the Messiah, and the things which He suffered, "He ought to have suffered," (Luke 24:26). And that gladness which Jesus brought to His disciples was not confined to them nor to the day of resurrection. His resurrec-

tion from the dead has ever since been considered one of the strongest poofs of His divinity. Many other evidences had already been given, as, for example, the fulfilling of the prophecies in His person and the miracles and wonderful works which He did in His life. But though these and many others were undoubtedly high proofs of His Divinity, yet His resurrection had a vast pre-emimence over them and authenticated His mission beyond all possibility of doubt. Jesus Himself staked the truth of His claims to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world upon His resurrection. When the Pharisees asked Him, in spite of all His miracles, for a sign from heaven, He would point them to none but that of the prophet Jonah—to the resurrection of the Son of Man from the grave; and when on another occasion they clamored for a sign, He said, speaking of His body, "I will destroy this temple and in three days rear it again." Jesus is, according to Paul, (Rom. 1: 1-4) marked off from all the universe as God's Son in possession of power by the resurrection of the dead—He is that very Jesus Christ whom we Christians adore as our Lord of all. No one fact in the history of mankind is proved by better and fuller evidence than the great sign which God has given us that Christ rose from the dead; and this sign is the seal of His divinity. For this firm foundation, which is laid for our faith, we rejoice on this Easter day.

Another cause of holy joy to us, His disciples, is the fact that

II. *The resurrection of our Lord was God's acceptance of His sacrifice.*

"The soul that sinneth shall die." This was the sentence passed upon the sinner. But here Jesus placed Himself in the sinner's stead and died, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." He took our debt, and delivered Himself of it by dying on the cross. But how do we know that God accepted the sacrifice? We know it by the fact of Christ's resurrection. It is God's sign-manual on the work of redemption. Rejoice, O Christian, for Christ by His death paid all your debt, and His resurrection is the public acknowledgement that the debt was paid. "He was not only delivered unto death for our offences," says Paul, writing to the Romans, "but that He was also raised again from the dead for our justification."

"My soul looks back to see
The burden Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the cursed tree,
And knows her guilt was there."

But lest there should be a shadow of a doubt that my debts are cancelled, behold, here in the resurrection of my Lord is a full receipt. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." The apostle derives even richer comfort in the fact of Christ's resurrection than in the fact of His death, since, while in Christ's death the debt was paid, in His resurrection the record was entirely blotted out. Is there not a glorious Easter joy in this doctrine for every child of God? Jesus is accepted by His resurrection and in Him we also are accepted. Let us, then, be glad and join in the apostle's doxology,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

We rejoice moreover, because of

III. *The Power of Christ's Resurrection in Our Hearts.*

Having been buried with Him in death, we rise with Him into newness of life. God has put wondrous possibilities in our souls, but they wait to know the power of His resurrection to spring into beauty and bloom. Life and the enlargement of life is the supreme lesson of to-day. If we dwell upon immortality, as if that were the only lesson of Easter, we depreciate the meaning of this great festival. Christ's resurrection does not simply assure us that we are to live forever. That in itself might be no great boon. When Paul wished that he might know the power of His resurrection, he did not yearn simply to have his life lengthened out. Paul wanted not only a new world, but a new man to inhabit that world. Do we know the real joy of Easter? It is not secured by a mere contemplation of the fact that Christ is risen. Our Christian life must be a reality, even as Christ's resurrection was real. It must be a living association with Jesus. The believer rejoices in Easter because he has been given the seal and security of the forgiveness of sins, of peace with God, of victory from sin, of a life of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

There is in the believer a part of the resurrec-

tion already accomplished, since it is written, "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." "Death is no more death, but life. Moses says the opposite. For if you will listen to the law, it will say to you, as the old spiritual song has it, 'In the midst of life we are with death encompassed.' The Gospel and faith, however, reverse this song and say, 'In the midst of death even we are in life.' We praise Thee, O gracious Lord God, that Thou art our Redeemer. Thou hast awaked us from death and given us salvation." (Luther.)

This will be a glad Easter day indeed if we lift our hearts to live a new life in Jesus—a life which will "never see death," but will find its completeness in the hereafter through the power of Him "who was dead, but is alive forevermore."

We rejoice, finally, because

IV. *The resurrection of Jesus is a pledge of our own resurrection.*

"If a man die, shall he live again?" This question, asked by Job more than three thousand years ago, comes to every thoughtful soul. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is taught by human reason. It is one of our deepest instincts. But there is no absolute proof of immortality apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He taught, with no uncertain sound, the fact of a future life, and by His own resurrection put the seal of reality upon His words. He "brake the bonds of death." Just as the Jewish husbandman saw in the first sheaf that was offered unto the Lord the earnest of the full

ingathering, so is the fact of Christ's resurrection the promise of ours. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep."

Jesus had made His disciples familiar with the thought of another world. Yet it was necessary that one should actually pass through the gates of death and return from that mysterious land beyond, before faith could firmly grasp it. And just this was granted. Jesus died. Loving hands took His precious form down from the cross and laid it away in the tomb. Not one of them ever expected to see Him alive again. But He arose from the dead. They looked into His face again and again during a period of forty days. They heard the old familiar voice. They touched Him. They were as certain that He was indeed their resurrected Lord as they were certain of their own being.

The victory over death which Christ achieved has been shared by believers ever since, and the dread of the last great change has been transformed into a tranquil resignation in the glad knowledge that after sunset there shall come a sunrise. Life becomes sweeter because the immortal day lies just beyond.

The time comes when we must bury the best we have and leave it in the soil. Gone are those that were dearest, and time can neither allay nor cure our grief. Weep, if you must, but only for yourself, when those who die in the Lord depart. Easter has placed an angel of God in every believer's grave and a wreath of immortality upon every Christian's casket. We stand by the open grave of our sainted ones

and say with confidence, "I know in whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." We lay our loved ones in the tomb, saying, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," but we "look for the general resurrection and the life of the world to come through our Lord Jesus Christ." In this fashion we remember our dead, and comfort one another with these words.

We, too, shall soon "fall asleep." Upon the fact of Christ's resurrection let us base our hope and confidence, that we shall rise unharmed by death. Why need our timid hearts shrink back from the shadows of death? Our Redeemer "hath brought life and immortality to light." "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." The air above us shall soon be bright with waving palms, and thick with dear faces and vanished smiles of long ago. We shall see the Lover of our souls face to face and be "forever with the Lord."

The Easter sun is shining. The Easter message is ringing round the world. It is "the joyful Sunday." Open your eyes and see, not the gardener, but the Master! Unstop your ears and hear the angel's message, "He is risen!" Gather flowers for our altars; tune your voices for exultant song! "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

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